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ADVISORY SERVICES IN THE FIELD OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Written statement submitted by the International Human Rights Law Group a non-governmental organization in consultative status (category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[24 February 1994]

Human rights in Cambodia and the United Nations Centre for Human Rights

1. The popular election and establishment of a new Government in Cambodia raises both hopes and concerns for the protection of human rights. Although there has been much progress on many human rights issues in recent years, human rights violations are still widespread in Cambodia. The justice system functions poorly - there are few trained judges and lawyers, existing law is often ignored and the police dominate the system. In the provinces there are often restrictions on freedom of association and expression. Many Cambodians do not have access to education, health care or safe drinking water. Until there are effective government institutions and laws in place, these problems will continue.

2. Cambodian human rights non-governmental organizations have worked closely with the Cambodian Government to improve respect for human rights throughout the country. We have issued statements on important human rights issues and suggested measures for reform. We have conducted human rights education programmes throughout the country to educate both ordinary citizens and government officials. We have investigated cases of human rights violations and reported our findings to the Government and to the United Nations.

3. The Cambodian human rights community faces many difficulties in achieving our goals. There are a wide range of human rights problems in Cambodia that should be addressed by the Government, but often are not. Cambodian human rights organizations do not have enough resources and trained staff members to carry out effective work. Roads and communications in the provinces are very poor, which limits our effectiveness in those parts of the country where human rights violations are most serious. And local officials often interfere with our efforts to promote human rights.

4. Very important to our work has been the close ties we have had with the United Nations. During the time of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), Cambodian human rights organizations worked alongside the Human Rights Component on many issues both in Phnom Penh and the provinces. Recently, we have undertaken education, training and other projects with the Phnom Penh field office of the Centre for Human Rights. We met with Justice Michael Kirby, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Cambodia, during his recent visit, and raised our concerns on many human rights issues.

5. The Cambodian human rights community strongly supports the Phnom Penh field office of the Centre for Human Rights. We are concerned that the inability of the United Nations to fund the Centre adequately has been detrimental to our own work, especially in the field of education and training. We urge that all nations that have pledged support for United Nations Trust Fund for Cambodia promptly fulfil their pledge and that other nations contribute as they are able. Second, we urge the United Nations to fill the post of Director of the Phnom Penh office with a person who is very knowledgeable of the human rights situation in Cambodia. Third, we ask that the United Nations extend the mandate of the Phnom Penh field office beyond 1995. The human rights problems faced by Cambodia are enormous - direct involvement by the Centre for Human Rights is necessary to ensure that the progress that has already occurred will continue.